

from Ecstasies (by Avrom Sutzkever)

Imprisoned, imprisoned
Am I
In the polished sounds
Of the sky —
No escape from its fences
That flame —
As before the eyes of a fly
In a glass
Overturned.
And beyond the glass — words bloom,
Blossoms grass
(Let me smash the glass walls, oh please!
Release!)
And above —
A flock of opal doves,
They cannot break out
Of the tangle of tunes,
Of the melody swing,
And remain
Imprisoned
Inside a ring.
Pity.

When with eyes shut
I wrote a poem, suddenly
My hand got burned,
And when I started
From the black fire,
The paper breathed
A name like a lily: God.

But my pen, in awe and wonder,
Crossed out the word
And wrote instead
A more familiar word: Man.

Since then, a voice unheard
Haunts me like an unseen bird
That pecks, pecks at my soul's door:
— Is that what you traded me for?

(From *The Forest*, 1937-39)

Translated from the Yiddish by
Harshav

Like a rain on a field all of a sudden —
And there is no hiding, no home outside it
—
In the middle of the roads,
In wild encounter, love fell upon me
And illuminated
The other side of my yearning.
— Why like a rain?
You don't know whence it comes,
whence it rolls,
You see only the spot where it falls.